



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Merciful as Thou art :
 Oh, how hard judgments rise !
 Oh, this censorious tongue,
 Evil-discerning eyes !
 Yet His sweet mercy will my King impart,
 If by no other way, e'en through the smart
 Of pity withheld in my extremities :
 Thy will be done !

Pure, e'en in Thy pure eyes :
 Single and free from guile ;
 Oh, when shall these vain thoughts
 Pure rising, meet Thy smile ?
 E'en this through Thee is mine : though it should be
 That, first, through purging fires, Thou go with me :
 Thy will be done !

Ruled by the Prince of Peace :
 How far from this my state—
 Oft striving for my own,
 Exacting, harsh, irate.
 No peace is found in me ; but Thou wilt come
 And make this chafing bosom Thy sweet home :
 Thy will be done !

Thus I abide His time ;
 For hath the King not sworn
 That all these shall be mine,
 And will not He perform ?
 If tender ways shall serve, such wilt Thou use ;
 But smite, if need be ; I would not refuse :
 Thy will be done !

THE CULTURE OF CHARACTER.

BY THE EDITOR.

“WHAT get I from my father ?
 Lusty life and vig’rous will ;
 What, from my gentle mother ?
 Cheerful days and poet’s skill,”*

says Goethe ; for poets, like the rest of us, are born, not made, and get the most of what they are from their parents. But it did not take poet or modern scientist to discover this ; people have known it time out of mind. Like father, like child, they said, and were satisfied ; for it was not the way in earlier days to thresh out the great facts of life. Not so, now, we talk about it, and about it ; call it *heredity*, and take it into count in our notions, at any rate, if not in our practice. Nobody writes a biography now without attempting to produce progenitors and early surroundings that shall account for his man or his woman. This fact of heredity is very much before the public, and, by-and-by, will have its bearing on the loose notions people hold about education. In this sort of way—“Harold is a bright little boy, but he hasn’t the least power of attention.”

“Oh, I know he hasn’t ; but then, poor child, he can’t help it ! ‘What’s bred in the bone,’ you know ; and we are feather-brained on both sides of the house.”

Now the practical educational question of our day is just this : Can he help it ? or, Can his parents help it ? or, Must the child sit down for life with whatever twist he has inherited ? The fact is, many of us, professional teachers, have been taking aim rather beside the mark ; we talk as if the development of certain faculties were the chief object of education : and we point to our results, intellectual, moral, æsthetic, physical, with a—See

* “Vom Vater hab’ ich die Statur,
 Des Lebens ernstes Führen ;
 Vom Mütterchen die Frohnatur,
 Und Lust zu fabuliren.”

there, what culture can effect! But we forget that the child has inborn cravings after all we have given him. Just as the healthy child must have his dinner and his bed, so, too, does he crave for knowledge, perfection, beauty, power, society; and all he wants is opportunity. Give him opportunities of loving and learning, and he will love and learn, for "tis his nature to." Whoever has taken note of the sweet reasonableness, the quick intelligence, the bright imaginings of a child, will think the fuss we make about the right studies for developing these is like asking, How shall we get a hungry man to eat his dinner?

Many a man got his turn for natural science because, as a boy, he lived in the country, and had a chance to observe living things and their ways. Nobody took pains to develop his faculty; all he had was opportunity. If the boy's mind is crammed with other matters, he has no opportunity, and you may meet men of culture who have lived most of their lives in the country, and don't know a thrush from a blackbird. I know of a woman who has developed both a metaphysical and a literary turn, because, as a girl of ten, she was allowed to browse on old volumes of the *Spectator*, the most telling part of her education, she thinks. Again, I watched quite lately an extraordinary educational result of opportunity. A friend, interested in a Working Boys' Club, undertook to teach a class to model in clay. There was no selection made; the boys were mill boys, taken as they came in, with no qualifications, except that, as their teacher said, they had not been spoilt—that is, they had not been taught to draw in the ordinary way. She gave them clay, a model, one or two modelling tools, and also, being an artist, the *feeling* of the object to be copied. After half a dozen lessons, the sort of things they produced cannot be called less than works of art; and delightful it was to see the vigour and spirit they worked with, the artistic instinct which caught the sentiment of the object, as, the creases made by a little foot which make a child's shoe a thing to kiss. This lady maintains that she only *let out* what was in the boys; but she did more, her own art-enthusiasm forced out artistic effort. Even taking into account the enthusiasm of the teacher—I wish we might always count on that factor—this remains a fair case to prove our point, which is, give them opportunity and direction, and children will do the greater part of their own education, intellectual, æsthetic, even moral, by reason of the wonderfully

balanced desires, powers, and affections which go to make up human nature. A cheerful doctrine this, which should help to swell the ranks of the unemployed. Outlets for their energies, a little direction, a little control, and then may we sit by with folded hands and see them do it? But, in fact, there are two things to be done; faculties to be developed—where a little of our help goes a long way; and character to be moulded—and here children are as clay in the hands of the potter, absolutely dependent on their parents. Disposition, intellect, genius, come pretty much by nature; but character is an achievement, the one practical achievement possible to us for ourselves and for our children; and all real advance in family or individual is along the lines of character. Our great people are great simply by reason of their force of character. For this, more than for their literary successes, Carlyle and Johnson are great. Boswell's "Life" is, and perhaps deserves to be, more of a literary success than anything of his master's; but what figure does he make after all?

Greatness and littleness belong to character, and life would be dull were we all cast in one mould; but how come we to differ? Surely by reason of our inherited qualities. It is hereditary tendencies which result in character. The man who is generous, obstinate, hot-tempered, devout, is so, on the whole, because that strain of character runs in his family. Some progenitor got a bent from his circumstances towards fault or virtue, and that bent will go on repeating itself to the end of the chapter. To save that single quality from the exaggeration which would destroy the balance of qualities we call sanity, two counter-forces are provided: marriage into alien families, and *education*.

We come round now to the point we started from. If the development of character rather than of faculty is the main work of education, and if people are born, so to speak, ready-made, with all the elements of their after-character in them, certain to be developed by time and circumstances, what is left for education to do?

Very commonly, the vote is, do nothing; though there are three or four ways of arriving at that conclusion.

As, What's the good? The fathers have eaten sour grapes; the children's teeth *must* be set on edge. Tommy is obstinate as a little mule—but what would you have? So is his father.

So have been all the Joneses, time out of mind ; and Tommy's obstinacy is taken as a fact, not to be helped or hindered.

Or, Mary is a butterfly of a child, never constant for five minutes to anything she has in hand. "That child is just like me" ! says her mother ; "but time will steady her." Fanny, again, sings herself to sleep with the Vesper Hymn (her nurse's lullaby) before she is able to speak. "It's strange how an ear for music runs in our family" ! is the comment, but no particular pains are taken to develop the talent.

Another child asks odd questions, is inclined to make little jokes about sacred things, to call his father "Tom," and, generally, to show a want of reverence. His parents are earnest-minded people—think with pain of the loose opinions of Uncle Harry, and decide on a policy of repression. "Do as you're bid, and make no remarks," becomes the child's rule of life, until he finds outlets little suspected at home.

In another case, common thought is much more on a level with the science of the day ; there is a tendency to lung-trouble: the doctors undertake to deal with the tendency so long as the *habit* of delicacy is not set up. The necessary precautions are taken, and there is no reason why the child should not die at a good old age.

Once more ;—there are parents who are aware of the advances science has made in education, but doubt the lawfulness of looking to science for aid in the making of character. They see hereditary defects in their children, but set them down as of "the natural fault and corruption of the nature of every man which naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam." This, they believe, it is not their part to remedy ; that is, unless the boy's fault be of a disturbing kind—a violent temper, for example—when the mother thinks no harm to whip the offending Adam out of him. But, so surely as we believe the laws of the spiritual life to have been revealed to us, so, not less surely, though without the same sanctity, have been revealed the laws by which body, mind and moral nature flourish or decay. These it behoves us to make ourselves acquainted with ; and the Christian parent who is shy of science, and prefers to bring up his children by the light of Nature when that of authoritative revelation fails, does so to his children's irreparable loss.

If the race is advancing, it is along the lines of character, for each new generation inherits and adds to the best that has gone

before it. We should have to-day the very flower and fruit that has been a-preparing through long lines of progenitors. Children have always been lovely, so far back as that day when a little child in the streets of Jerusalem was picked up and set in the midst to show of what sort are the princes in the Kingdom to come :

"In the Kingdom are the children ;
You may read it in their eyes ;
All the freedom of the Kingdom
In their careless humour lies."

And what mother has not bowed before the princely heart of innocence in her own little child ? But apart from this, of their glad living in the sunshine of the Divine Countenance, surely our children are "more so" than those of earlier days. Never before was a "Jackanapes" written, or the "Story of a Short Life." Shakespeare never made a child, nor Scott, hardly Dickens, often as he tried ; either we are waking up to what is in them, or the children are indeed advancing in the van of the times, holding in light grasp the gains of the past, the possibilities of the future. It is the age of child-worship ; and very lovely are the well-brought-up children of Christian and cultured parents. But, alas, how many of us degrade the thing we love ! Think of the multitude of innocents to be launched on the world, already mutilated, spiritually and morally, at the hands of doting parents !

The dutious father and mother, on the contrary, who discern any lovely family trait in one of their children, set themselves to nourish and cherish it as a gardener the peaches he means to show. We know how "that kiss made me a painter" ! that is, warmed into life whatever art-faculty the child had. The choicer the plant, the gardener tells us, the greater the pains must he take with the rearing of it : and here is the secret of the loss and waste of some of the most beauteous and lovable natures the world has seen ; they have not had the pains taken with their rearing that their delicate, sensitive organisations demanded. Think how Shelley was left to himself ! We live in embarrassing days. It is well to cry, "Give us light—more light and fuller" ! but what if the new light discover to us a maze of obligations, intricate and tedious ? It is, at first sight, bewildering to perceive that for whatever distinctive quality, moral or intellectual, we discern in the children, special culture is demanded ; but, after all, our obligation towards each such quality resolves itself into

providing for it these four things: nourishment, exercise, change, and rest.

A child has a great turn for languages (his grandfather was the master of nine); the little fellow "lisps in Latin," learns his "mensa" from his nurse, knows his declensions before he is five. What line is open to the mother who sees such an endowment in her child? First, let him use it; let him learn his declensions and whatever else he takes to without the least sign of effort. Probably the Latin case-endings come as easily and pleasantly to his ear as does "See-Saw, Margery Daw" to the ordinary child, though no doubt "Margery Daw" is the wholesomer kind of thing. Let him do just so much as he takes to of his own accord; but never urge, never applaud, never show him off. Next, let words convey ideas as he is able to bear them. Buttercup, primrose, dandelion, magpie, each tells its own tale; daisy is day's eye, opening with the sun, and closing when he sets,

"That well by reason it men callen may,
The daisie, or else the eye of day."

Let him feel that the common words we use without a thought are beautiful, full of story and interest. It is a great thing that the child should get the *ideas* proper to the qualities inherent in him. An idea fitly put is taken in without effort, and, once in, ideas behave like living creatures—they feed, grow, and multiply. Next, provide him with some one delightful change of thought, that is, with work and ideas altogether apart from his bent for languages. Let him know, with friendly intimacy, every out-of-door object that comes in his way—the chaffinch, the rose-chaffer, the ways of the caddis-worm, forest-trees, field-flowers—all natural objects, common and curious, near his home. No other knowledge is so delightful; not natural science, but common acquaintance with natural objects.

Or, again, some one remarks that all our great inventors have in their youth handled material—clay, wood, iron, brass, pigments. Let him work in material. To provide a child with delightful resources on lines opposed to his natural bent is the one way of keeping a quite sane mind in the presence of an absorbing pursuit.

At the same time, change of occupation is not rest: if a man ply a machine, now with his foot, and now with his hand, the foot or the hand rests, but the man does not. A game of romps

(better, so far as mere rest goes, than games with laws and competitions), nonsense talk, a fairy tale, or to lie on his back in the sunshine, should rest the child, and of such as these he should have his fill.

This, speaking broadly, is the *rationale* of the matter:—just as actually as we sew or write through the instrumentality of the hand, so the child learns, thinks, feels, by means of a material organ—the very delicate nervous tissue of the cerebrum. Now this tissue is constantly and rapidly wearing away. The more it is used, whether in the way of mental effort or emotional excitement, the more it wears away. Happily, rapid new growth replaces the waste, wherefore, work and consequent waste of tissue are necessary. But let the waste get ahead of the gain, and lasting mischief happens. Therefore never let the child's brain-work exceed his chances of reparation, whether such work come in the way of too hard lessons, or of the excitement attending childish dissipations. Another plea for abundant rest:—one thing at a time, and that done well, appears to be Nature's rule; and his hours of rest and play are the hours of the child's physical growth—witness the stunted appearance of children who are allowed to live in a whirl of small excitements.

A word more as to the necessity of *change of thought* for the child who has a distinct bent. The brain tissue not only wastes with work, but, so to speak, wastes locally. We all know how done up we are after giving our minds for a few hours or days to any one subject, whether anxious or joyous: we are glad at last to escape from the engrossing thought, and find it a weariness when it returns upon us. It would appear that, set up the continuous working of certain ideas, and a certain tract of the brain substance is, as it were, worn out and weakened with the constant traffic in these ideas. And this is of more consequence when the ideas are moral than when they are merely intellectual. Hamlet's thoughts play continuously round a few distressing facts; he becomes morbid, not entirely sane; in a word, he is *eccentric*. Now, possibly, eccentricity is a danger against which the parents of well-descended children must be on the watch. These are born with strong tendencies to certain qualities and ways of thinking. Their bringing up tends to accentuate their qualities; the balance between these and other qualities is lost, and they become eccentric persons. Mr.

Matthew Arnold writes down the life and the work of a great poet as *ineffectual*; and this is, often enough, the verdict passed upon the eccentric. Whatever force of genius and of character, whatever lovely moral traits they may have, the world will not take them as guides for good, unless they do as others do in things lawful and expedient; and truly, there is a broad margin for originality in declining to hunt with the hounds in things neither lawful nor expedient.

Now, practically, what is the mother's course who notices in her most promising child little traits of oddity? He does not care much for games, does not get on well with the rest, has some little den of his own where he ruminates. Poor little fellow! he wants a confidante badly; most likely he has tried nurse and brothers and sisters, to no purpose. If this go on, he will grow up with the idea that nobody wants him, nobody understands him, will take his slice of life and eat it (with a snarl) all by himself. But if his mother have tact enough to get at him, she will preserve for the world one of its saving characters. Depend upon it, there is something at work in the child—genius, humanity, poetry, ambition, pride of family. It is that he wants outlet and exercise for an inherited trait almost too big for his childish soul. Rosa Bonheur was observed to be a restless child whose little shoes of life were a misfit: lessons did not please her, and play did not please her; and her artist-father hit on the notion of soothing the child's divine discontent by—apprenticing her to a needlewoman! Happily she broke her bonds, and we have her pictures. In the case of pride of birth, it is well that the child should be brought face to face and heart to heart with the "great humility" of our Pattern. But, that being done, this sense of family distinction is a wonderful lever to raise the little world of the child's nature. *Noblesse oblige*. He must needs add honour and not dishonour to a distinguished family. I know of a little boy who bears two distinguished family names—Browning-Newton, let us say. He goes to a preparatory school, where it is the custom to put the names of defaulters on the blackboard. By-and-by, his little brother goes to school too, and the bigger boy's exordium is:—"We'll never let two such names as ours be stuck up on the blackboard!"

Amongst the immediate causes of eccentricity is the dreariness of daily living, the sense of which falls upon us all at times,

and often with deadly weight upon the more finely strung and highly gifted. "Oh, dear! I wish I was in Jupiter!" sighed a small urchin who had already used up this planet. It rests with the parents to see that the dreariness of a motiveless life does not settle, sooner or later, on any one of their children. We are made with a yearning for the "fearful joy" of passion; and if this do not come to us in lawful ways, we look for it in eccentric, or worse, in illegitimate courses. The mother, to whom her child is as an open book, must find a vent for the restless working of his nature—the more apt to be troubled by—

"The burden of the mystery,
The heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world"—

the more finely he is himself organised. Fill him with the enthusiasm of humanity. Whatever gifts he has, let them be cultivated as "gifts for men." "The thing best worth living for is to be of use," was well said lately by a thinker who has left us. The child into whose notion of life that idea is fitted will not grow up to find time heavy on his hands. The life blessed with an enthusiasm will not be dull, but a weight must go into the opposite scale to balance even the noblest enthusiasm. As we have said, open for him some door of natural science, some way of mechanical skill; in a word, give the child an absorbing pursuit and a fascinating hobby, and you need not fear eccentric or unworthy developments. It seems well to dwell at length on this subject of eccentricity, because the world loses a great deal by its splendid failures, the beautiful human beings who through one sort of eccentricity or another become ineffectual for the raising of the rest of us.